1: Childs M-5 (1924-1940) 1949 FP 13 Mbundu FP 13

expeditions. Many blood-brotherhoods were doubtless undertaken purely from motives of friendship.[1] The *vakuacisoko* is a friendly institution. The Ovimbundu are a friendly people.

Identification is a strikingly important feature of Umbundu social adjustments and of the whole learning process. Children overtly identify themselves with older siblings, with parents, with other older relatives both living and dead, with friends of their parents, with the village headman, or even the king.[2] This perhaps is the process involved in that which the Ovimbundu name reincarnation. It is largely through identification that character appears to run in families. This is why boys are so keen to learn the professions of their fathers or their mother's brothers. Identification with their seniors in social position and economic activity more closely cements the unity of the child–adult sphere and gives the children yet another urge to enter into adult life and assume complete responsibility as quickly as possible.

'Inferiority Conflict' has probably been present in Umbundu life for a long time, perhaps since the rubber trade (1874), perhaps even longer. When a people's activity is keyed to so high a pitch there will be some individuals who find themselves inadequate. There are a number of proverbs which ridicule the stay-at-homes or those 'too lazy' to undertake the exceedingly arduous trading expeditions. European domination has set new paces and created new frustrations, with one result, that 'inferiority conflicts' are probably on the increase. Many individual instances could be cited. A particularly striking one of my observation is of a man whose suffering from epileptic seizures had induced attitudes of inferiority. The conflict was exacerbated by his selection as a hospital assistant, in which position the responsibility required was plainly beyond his ability.[3] Individuals suffering from any physical disability find life difficult among such an aggressive people.

If the disability is great the handicapped individual generally finds the adjustment beyond his powers. I have observed a number of severely crippled individuals brought up in traditional kinship groups, and all of them were suffering from overt inferiority conflicts. All of these individuals had adopted compensatory

[1] Although the rite seems to have connotations of sorcery.

[2] Among the Tallensi, according to Fortes, identification is only with older siblings, with parents, and with 'the clan' (op. cit., pp. 46 ff.).

[3] Epilepsy (*ocinonya*) is considered by the Ovimbundu as a visitation of the spirits and is much feared.

1: Childs M-5 (1924-1940) 1949 FP13 Mbundu FP13

159 behaviour of an anti-social nature.[1] The foregoing analysis refers chiefly to those of the Ovimbundu who now live or were reared within their traditional social structure, with but slight reference to other individuals.

The Umbundu Estimate of Character

156 183 The Umbundu concept of personality as being achieved by a process of social integration is of fundamental importance, bearing in mind that society consists of the whole kinship group—including the living and the dead, men and spirits. The process of achieving integration together with reactions to various cultural elements interestingly reveal the types of character appreciated and those disliked by the Ovimbundu.

Almost everything in Umbundu life and culture reveals them to be a strong and aggressive people. Their history, whether of raiding or of trading, is eloquent testimony to this. The early age at which children participate and assume responsibility in social and economic life has doubtless contributed toward the development of aggressive attitudes. The system of marriage which places the balance of responsibility in all particulars upon the bridegroom and not on his elders, but at the same time requires the willing consent of the bride, is evidently a development of a strongly aggressive people. Their economic life witnesses to the same fact, whether one considers their trade or their agriculture. None but an aggressive (or a very stubborn) people could succeed at farming in a region of such poor soil. Basing his observations only on their pillage and robbery of all their neighbours, and on the submission of the latter, Magyar remarked that the Ovimbundu were the greatest people of South Africa.[2]

In view of these facts it is not difficult to understand that the Ovimbundu appreciate character integration which includes a high degree of self-expression. Such 'traits'[3] as drive, extroversion, insight, ascendance, and expansion[4] are desired and appreciated by the Ovimbundu. Introversion and reclusion, on the other hand, are disliked. In the more extreme forms they are feared and

[1] Stealing is one of the commonest types of behaviour in such cases.

[2] L. Magyar, *Reisen in Süd-Afrika*, p. 265.

[3] The term is used merely for convenience to cover types of behaviour. The specificity of the responses which make up character is assumed; cf. Hugh Hartshorne and Mark May, *Studies in the Nature of Character*, 3 vols. (New York: Macmillan, 1928–30).

[4] After Allport, op. cit., chap. v.

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suspected as indications of sorcery. It would of course be impossible to indicate what proportion achieve the ideal. It would seem that their respective manners of life have favoured its development in the men more largely than in the women. May this perhaps be one reason why women seem to be caught more often in the vicious circle of suspicion of sorcery?

Fearing anger and ill will as a root-cause of sorcery, yet developing a very aggressive type of character, and achieving in their villages and other social groupings such a large measure of socialized life, the adjustments in anger achieved have been, perhaps, a necessary prerequisite. That does not make the achievement any less important. Note has already been made of the ability to use humour as an outlet for anger, which is held to be an indication of true insight.[1]

Statesmanlike ability, good judgement, and dignity were often noted by the early missionaries as qualities of some of the old kings, councillors, and headmen.[2] After 1900 these qualities were less often observed, owing perhaps to the demoralizing effects of the rum trade. These qualities have, however, survived to the present day and may be observed in pastors, elders, teachers, and other leaders of the church. That shrewd behaviour (*oku lunguka*) is appreciated by this great trading people is easily understood, but it is not as universally or unreservedly admired as are some other types.

There is also a tender side to Umbundu character. It might conceivably be supposed that long-continued and intimate participation in such inhumane occupations as the slave-trade might leave a stamp of callous brutality on the character of the Ovimbundu generally.[3] On second thought a similar question might be raised with regard to Americans because of their participation in the same slave-traffic, or their more recent participation in equally ruthless practices under the banner of modern capitalism.

The rarity or absence among kings of the Ovimbundu of resort to 'revolting and wholesale punishments—so common at African courts' has been noted.[4] On the positive side, a most admirable

[1] Cf. Allport, op. cit., pp. 118, 344.

[2] Cf. *Missionary Herald*, 1883, p. 229; 1886, p. 143; 1887, pp. 26, 530, &c.

[3] H. W. Nevinson alleged some such effect. Cf. *A Modern Slavery*, chap. ii. The references are to people of Viye. The effects noted were more probably due to long association with Europeans.

[4] *Supra*, p. 21 f.

1: Childs M-5 (1924-1940) 1949 FP13 Mbundu FP13

156 183 tenderness towards and consideration for those weaker than oneself, for women, for children, and for the aged may be seen among Ovimbundu who are quite untouched by Christianity or Christian teachings in any form. This was often noticed and remarked upon by the early missionaries.[1] Umbundu treatment of children, the habitually respectful form of address used in speaking to them, and respect for their personalities[2] is further evidence of this tender side of Umbundu character, as is also their banning of angry behaviour from the relations of the home.[3]

141 Such a combination of aggressive, dignified, and tender behaviour makes for character worthy of admiration. It is a heritage worth conserving and passing on to succeeding generations.

000 Description and analysis now hands the problem to education. I cannot find a more fitting close for this chapter than the following statement of the problem:

> From the obscurities that for us still hang about African childhood, the fact emerges that Africans do educate their children. It is a genuine education. . . . What the African sets out to do, namely, to prepare the new generation to take its place in the community and carry on the tribal tradition, he accomplishes with a very considerable measure of success. . . . What Mr. Bryant has said of the Zulus may be said of some other African tribes: 'Through the ages, this admirable system of forming character and imparting knowledge continued, until at length was evolved a Zulu race noble of heart, dignified of bearing, refined of manners, and learned in natural science—qualities, alas! rapidly dying out before the destructive and demoralizing advance of European civilization!' The concluding sentence applies to many a tribe. No small part of the demoralization is caused by the disturbance of family life through the prolonged absence of the senior males at work on European mines and plantations and through the flocking of boys to European towns; it is in the family life, as we have seen, that the most

[1] 'We saw a party crossing the Kulili (*Kulēlē*) River on a bridge of the frailest construction. The young men went first, deposited their loads on the bank, and returned for the loads of the old men, who carefully crept over unburdened. Then some of the young men recrossed and took their baskets from the women, and their babies as well. Last of all, two strong youths assisted the women themselves to cross. Nothing could be more tenderly considerate.

'Whatever customs may prevail in other parts of Africa, here it is entirely false to say that women are ill-treated. No one of either sex does any great amount of work, but such as it is is fairly divided. . . . They are certainly as well-treated as the wives of the poorer classes at home, and do infinitely less drudgery.' From a letter of Dr. Nichols in the *Missionary Herald* for 1883, p. 229.

[2] See *supra*, p. 120 f.

[3] See *supra*, p. 124 f.

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Ethnologists have often emphasized the supposed subjection of the individuals to the group. Initiation rites do tend to uniformity of conduct and group control; yet among the Ovimbundu there are renowned leaders of caravans, chiefs who are respected because of their justice and intelligence, also medicine-men, craftsmen, and musicians who display great individuality. Their self-expression in tribal life results from special aptitude and natural force of character, which qualities are made evident by daily actions, or through loquacity in the council house. In several localities live chiefs, who, by personality and tact, make possible a social adjustment between the indigenous culture and foreign intruders.

In former times kings were at the head of the legal and military systems, and in this capacity they acted when appeals were made from the jurisdiction of village chiefs. Prosperity of the country is today thought to center in kings both living and dead, and the extant ritual associated with the obsequies of a king is an illustration of this dependence. The importance of the medicine-man as a diviner, physician, and rain-maker is little diminished even at the present day.

The operation of village communism and the manner in which this centers about persons of importance is seen during the preparation of a new site for a village. A description has been given relating to the selection of the site, employment of communal labor, the creation and distribution of new fire, and the function of the medicine-man on this occasion.

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Direct questioning concerning spiritual beliefs and the nature of a supreme being elicits little information, and that of a contradictory kind. As usual, actions are more important than statements. At a funeral, women dance, clap hands, and sing, "God has cheated us of a life." The inference seems to be that Suku gives and determines life. Beliefs respecting the good and bad spirits (*Olosande* and *Olondele*) are deeply ingrained in the lives of the Ovimbundu, who are confident of the need for placation of spirits by sacrifice, the use of wooden figurines, and the aid of the medicine-man. A study of the contents of a diviner's basket gives a clear idea of the powers and the activities of spirits; and the function of a spirit, which is able to hear and answer the living, is understood after observing the questioning of the corpse at a funeral. Without doubt, a belief in spirits and a reliance on the power of medicine-men are two of the fundamental ideas which permeate every thought and activity of the Ovimbundu, for by these agencies mundane matters are raised to a spiritual level.

6:Edwards E-5 (1955-1956)1962
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servant of mine explaining how the Mwekalia chose the chief said, giving me a comparison: 'The Bishop of Nova Lisboa thinks "This priest has sense" and so makes him the superior of a mission'.[6] The disintegration of the old political system, and the association of its representatives with the ritual values which are no longer very significant for the mass of Ovimbundu, has destroyed the old pyramid of authority and prestige. The people associate demands and punishment, for which they seem to receive very little in return, with the post. Many draw a distinction between the actual *chefe* and the government, which they regard as benevolent and ignorant of the behaviour of its representatives. Despite such expressions of loyalty as the singing of the Portuguese national anthem at village parties the 'government' is too distant and shadowy for the Ovimbundu to have much knowledge of it. Nor has the post tried effectively to build up new types of bureaucratic authority in the villages—the government headmen are not given sufficient backing or responsibility by the post to do more than execute its orders.

Hence, the establishment of new types of grouping and leadership at the local level has been the work of the missions, and it is through the missions that these new groupings are articulated on to the total Angolan social system. The missionaries, who provide this articulation between the 'civilized' society and the local organization of the natives, form the section of the 'civilized' population which most satisfies, in its relations with the people, the expectations of the Africans.

To use another term, it is within the Catholic and Protestant Churches that Ovimbundu most clearly identify themselves. Baptism identifies an individual by giving him a name, hence Christians object to non-baptized people identifying themselves in this way. To an individual baptism is significant since it is concerned with his destiny. By it also he identifies himself with the 'civilized' population and achieves a new status superior to that of the pagans. The newly-born child of Christian parents will be given a Christian name and also an Umbundu name from one already held by a dead kinsman.[7] A few villagers

[6] Actually responsibility for appointing superiors of missions largely belongs to the superior of the Nova Lisboa district of the Congregação do Espírito Santo.

[7] For Umbundu names, see Elisabeth Ennis, *African Studies* (Johannesburg) March 1945.